

Obituary

FAYETTE WATT BIRTCH.
San Francisco.



It is a very rare thing that a man who was in medicine for only eleven years, and who spent all of that time in one hospital and in a relatively subordinate position, can be said to have made a distinct impression on the medicine of his time and place, or, even more, on the medicine of the country. And yet I think that Birtch can, with full justice, be credited with having done all of these things. Beginning with disappointment at the results of hospital work and moved by a mighty desire to make them better, he called a group of young professional men about him and began with them a study of methods in the St. Luke's Hospital Clinical Club. Out of this came the evolution of diagnosis by associated examiners, in which each and every organ or system of the patient is explored or interrogated by some one especially trained. The systematic completeness of this method is its point of difference from any other scheme in which consultation by some or many men is secured, and the composite which states negative findings as of equal value with positive, and makes the positive and negative in the final estimate present a picture of the patient's condition in its totality, has a far greater value than any method of examination in use up to the present time. Such a method could not have been thought of, still less worked out, by any man but one in search of the whole truth about his patients and wholly dissatisfied with partial statements, no matter how valuable true partial statements might seem to be, because in a complete exposition only could a true statement of a part be properly valued. It is a breadth of view about that common person, the patient, that very few of our profession have attained; it is a viewpoint to which no clinician will ever come alone; he must always have, as co-workers, those with vision trained to see that to which he is blind, or ears to hear sounds to which he is deaf, or associates to take over detail work; it is, unqualifiedly, the method of a Group, a distinct innovation in examination, as definite a step in advance in the study of patients as would be the discovery of a new panacea in therapeutics. It is a properly worked out method which should not be named for any so-

ciety or hospital, but should be given, in simple justice, the name of its creator and be called the Birtch method.

The man who did this had an average origin and personality and education, but he was above the average in his mastering desire for knowledge of the whole truth. This was his predominant quality. With it was a great sympathy with those not making successes of their endeavors, and to their aid he voluntarily always went in the schools in which he taught, the colleges in which he studied, and the hospital in which he worked. In this last place he came, at critical times, to the help of not a few practitioners who brought patients there, and this delicate matter he always accomplished with entire regard for the established relations of physician and patient, rendering his service to both with an unobtrusive efficiency which made the service doubly grateful. In the Group he gathered in what is known as the Diagnostic Section of the St. Luke's Hospital Clinical Club, he was naturally the leader, and his stimulating effort had distinct personal effects on its members, so that while he built the method he also improved the material put into it.

In his brief opportunity he could write but few papers, and of these that describing the group method of diagnosis, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 1916, and the paper he read at the Coronado meeting of the Medical Society of the State of California on "Preoperative Investigation by Group Study" are easily the most important, the former describing the method and the latter showing its practical application and its inestimable efficiency in lessening post-operative mortality. Because of this paper, in the future a patient with a surgical possibility should have his value as an operative risk much more carefully estimated, and when statistics under the method have accumulated, an equation may be the final statement of the expectation of treatment, and this chiefly because a quiet man, living a much shut-in life, had two dominating characteristics—a passionate desire to know all of the truth about his patients, and a great sympathy which took him directly to the help of those who needed it.

HARRY M. SHERMAN.

Carpenter, Porter Harman, a graduate of State University, Iowa, 1910; died in Los Angeles May 25, 1918.

Owens, James S., a graduate of the Hahnemann Medical College, Chicago, Ill.; died June 16, 1918.

Howard, Walter I., a graduate of the University of Michigan, 1882; died in San Francisco July 7, 1918.

Dr. Allen E. Scott, San Francisco, died June 14th, 1918, of endocarditis. Was a graduate of the California Medical College, Calif., 1883.

Dr. Julius C. Voje, San Francisco, died in San Francisco June 18th, 1918, of cerebral hemorrhage. Age 59. Was a graduate of Cooper Medical College, 1894.

Allen, Woodsen, Berkeley, Calif. Died June 1, 1918. Was a graduate of Eclectic Medical Institute, Ohio, in 1884.

Watson, Wm. Seth, Sacramento, Calif. Died May 26, 1918. Graduate of the Bellevue Hospital Medical College, N. Y., 1870.

Elliott, Albert J., San Diego, Calif. Died May 23, 1918. Was a graduate of the University of Michigan, 1897. Age 45.

Clark, Wm. Sumner, Los Angeles, Calif. Died June 4, 1918. Was a graduate of the Central College Physicians & Surgeons, Indianapolis, 1881. Was a member of the Medical Society, State of California.

In Errata.—In the June issue, 1918, on page 322, the name Miller, Jas. T., should have read Jas. T. Martin, who died March 29, 1918, in Sacramento.